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**Commentary**

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**SALT and Soviet-American Relations**

One of the most pressing current policy questions is "After SALT II, What?"—a question indicative of the change in Soviet-American relations. Not only has a SALT II agreement not been signed, but if and when it is, divisive debate is guaranteed; there is at least some chance the agreement will be defeated. Indeed, the key current question relates less to substance than political timing. Some of the reasons for this doleful state of Soviet-American relations have to do with SALT as such. But there are other reasons that should be examined first.

*The Decline and Fall of Detente*

The high point of Soviet-American relations in recent years, and perhaps in the entire post-war period, was from the German treaty of 1970 through mid-1973. It is worth recalling that in June 1973 Brezhnev visited this country in an atmosphere that was almost cordial. A leading American Sovietologist, Marshal Shulman, wrote that it was clear relations had entered a "new state," and that future fluctuation would occur within narrower margins. (*Foreign Affairs*, Oct. 1973) The Nixon Administration stated in February 1973 "... we have now taken that essential first step in freeing both of our countries from perpetual confrontation ... we are now in a new period, but we have only witnessed its initial phase."

Brezhnev, for his part, told American Senators and businessmen that he wanted to give relations maximum stability and make the improvement in relations "irreversible." What was happening was not so much that the participants were becoming euphoric, but that both sides had put themselves in a position of requiring an almost impossible series of successes to demonstrate the validity of their rhetoric claims. This is not to say that the change in public relations was in

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